

Leahy and Jeffords vote to support Alito filibuster

Bob Kinzel

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(Host) Both of Vermont U.S. senators have voted to support a filibuster of the nomination of Judge Samuel Alito to the United States Supreme Court.

However late Monday afternoon, supporters of Alito were able to secure enough votes to block the filibuster.

This means the full Senate will vote on the nomination on Tuesday.

VPR's Bob Kinzel reports:

(Kinzel) Senator Patrick Leahy, who's the ranking Democrat on the Senate Judiciary Committee, had previously announced his opposition to the Alito nomination but the decision to support the filibuster wasn't made until over the weekend.

Leahy says it's clear that Alito has enough votes in the full Senate to win approval. Virtually all of the 55 Republicans are supporting him and a handful of Democrats have said they'll also vote for his nomination.

Leahy says he voted in favor of the filibuster because he doesn't believe that Judge Alito supports the concept of a strong, independent judiciary.

(Leahy) "I think that he was the wrong person right from the beginning he was picked, it was very obvious, after meetings with Dick Cheney, Karl Rove and Scooter Libby as having somebody that they could rely upon. I don't think any president, Democratic or Republican, should have a Supreme Court justice that he feels he can rely upon to carry out a particular agenda. We have 9 members of the Supreme Court now. I voted for 8 of the nine. But I'm not going to vote for this one because I really don't think he'd serve as a check and balance to the president."

(Kinzel) Leahy says supporters of the filibuster knew they didn't have the votes to block the nomination but he says it was important to try:

(Leahy) "The vote may be seen as symbolic, but I just really believe this is not the right person to be on the court. I wish there was a way of stopping him. But they have taken a very party line position on the Republican side. Many of them did within minutes of the time he was announced, before they even had a chance to find out who he was or what his philosophy was. So it's been an uphill battle the whole way."

(Kinzel) Senator James Jeffords also voted to support the filibuster.

In a statement Jeffords said, "I believe Judge Alito's appointment to the United States Supreme Court will shift the balance of the court for years, perhaps decades to come. There is too much at stake for our country to allow this to happen."

The full Senate is now scheduled to vote to confirm Judge Alito on Tuesday.

For Vermont Public Radio I'm Bob Kinzel in Montpelier.

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